

THE SOAPBOX

Seeing Like a Settler Colonial State

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In 1998, the Canadian historian and politician Michael Ignatieff wrote: “All nations depend on forgetting: on forging myths of unity and identity that allow a society to forget its founding crimes, its hidden injuries and divisions, its unhealed wounds.”¹ Ironically, Ignatieff’s home country has belied his assertion. Canada has engaged in collective remembering of one of its hidden injuries—the Indian residential schools—through a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) from 2009 to 2015. Australia, too, has reckoned since the 1990s with its own unhealed wounds—the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, or, in common parlance, the “Stolen Generations.”

These efforts involved an intense engagement with and amendment of each nation’s history. Canada’s TRC and Australia’s Stolen Generations Inquiry gathered testimony from thousands of Indigenous people, many of whom bore witness to the brutal methods by which authorities had removed them as children and the abuse they had endured in institutions or in foster or adoptive families. Mick Dodson, an Aboriginal man of Yawuru descent who co-chaired Australia’s inquiry, explained that the testimonies “were very painful, but people wanted to tell their stories. It was an official validation that what they had been saying for generations was true. They are now in the official record of the history of Australia.”² Memoirists and scholars, some Indigenous and some not, played essential roles in moving these sidelined histories into the center of public discourse.³ Australian and Canadian scholars, too, have also developed a vital theoretical framework for understanding each nation’s history: settler colonialism.⁴ None of this, of course, is uncontested.⁵

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¹Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (Toronto, 1998), 166. In the nineteenth century, the French political theorist Ernest Renan made a similar point. He said, “... forgetting, I would go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation,” quoted in Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (Minneapolis, 2007), 105.

²Mick Dodson, interview by the author, July 21, 2014.

³In Australia, Aboriginal activist Margaret Tucker’s memoir, *If Everyone Cared* (Sydney, 1977), and the non-Indigenous historian Peter Read’s occasional paper, *Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales, 1883–1969* (Surrey Hills, New South Wales, 1981), were instrumental in bringing Aboriginal child removal to light. See also Jackie Huggins and Rita Huggins, *Auntie Rita* (Canberra, 1994). For Canada, see Basil Johnston, *Indian School Days* (Norman, OK, 1989); Celia Haig-Brown, *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving Residential School* (Vancouver, 1988); J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto, 1996); and John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1996* (Winnipeg, 1999).

⁴For Canada, see Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, eds., *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class* (London, 1995). For Australia, see Patrick Wolfe, “Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race,” *American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (June 2001): 866–905.

⁵For an example of naysayers in Canada, see Rodney E. Clifton and Hymie Rubenstein, “Clifton & Rubenstein: Debunking the Half-Truths and Exaggerations in the Truth and Reconciliation Report,” *National Post*, June 4,

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The United States also carried out forcible Indigenous child removal throughout the twentieth century. Outside of Indian country or academic conferences, however, there is little awareness of such practices, let alone an official inquiry or reconciliation process. Moreover, synthetic narratives of twentieth-century American history—in contrast to those in Canada and Australia—have by and large neglected to include the nation's Indigenous peoples. Twentieth-century U.S. Indigenous histories seem to exist in a parallel universe, largely irrelevant to the broader American story.⁶ Many historians of the modern United States may thus be proving Ignatieff right; we may be “forging myths of unity and identity” that allow the nation to forget a “hidden injury” and ignore an “unhealed wound.”⁷

It is not that twentieth-century U.S. historians have not confronted some of the nation's other intractable myths or examined some of its deepest scars. African American historians have worked hard and for a long time to expose the “founding crimes” of slavery, the “hidden injuries” of Jim Crow, and the ongoing, “unhealed wounds” of police brutality and incarceration. African American history has gained such force in analyzing racial hierarchies, inequalities, and power dynamics that it is no longer possible to chronicle modern American history without it. This, too, is not uncontested. But we now collectively remember this critical part of American history.

It is time for twentieth-century historians to remember Indigenous histories, and it will not be enough to simply slot Indigenous peoples into existing narratives. Like Canadian and Australian scholars, we will need to reckon with the history of settler colonialism. This will radically transform how we write and teach about the twentieth century. And thus I climb onto my soapbox to make a case for settler colonialism as a key reframing concept and to scrutinize the continued marginalization of modern Indigenous histories. I use Indian child welfare in the post–World War II era as a case study of how attention to Indigenous histories might transform our key concepts and narratives of twentieth-century American history, particularly in regard to the state, race and liberalism, and social movements.⁸

2015, <http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/clifton-rubenstein-debunking-the-half-truths-and-exaggerations-in-the-truth-and-reconciliation-report> (accessed June 20, 2017). For a critique of the Stolen Generations Inquiry and Report in Australia, see Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Vol. III: The Stolen Generations, 1881–2008* (Sydney, 2009).

⁶For other calls to address the lack of attention to modern Indigenous histories, see Philip J. Deloria, “American Master Narratives and the Problem of Indian Citizenship in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 3–12; Philip Deloria, “Conquest Histories and Narratives of Displacement: Civil Rights, Diaspora, and Transnationalism in Ethnic and American Studies,” in *Aspects of Transnational and Indigenous Cultures*, eds. Hsinya Huang and Clara Shu-Chun Chang (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2014), 1–29; Colleen O’Neill, “Rethinking Modernity and the Discourse of Development in American Indian History, an Introduction,” in *Native Pathways: American Indian Culture and Economic Development in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Brian Hosmer and Colleen O’Neill (Boulder, CO, 2004), 1–24; Boyd Cothran and C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, “An Introduction to ‘Forum: Indigenous Histories of The Gilded Age and Progressive Era,’” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14, no. 4 (Oct. 2015): 503–11; and Susan Sleeper-Smith, Juliana Barr, Jean M. O’Brien, Nancy Shoemaker, and Scott Manning Stevens, eds., *Why You Can’t Teach United States History Without American Indians* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015).

⁷On historical memory and American Indians, see Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, MA, 2013); Boyd Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War: Redemptive Violence and the Making of American Innocence* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2014); David W. Grua, *Surviving Wounded Knee: The Lakotas and the Politics of Memory* (New York, 2016).

⁸My focus on Indian child welfare offers just one example of how Indigenous histories both challenge and enrich our twentieth-century chronicles of American history. There are many other fruitful areas where Indigenous histories may cause us to question and amend our long-held and emerging narratives. New histories of capitalism, for example, are incomplete without attention to Indigenous histories in the twentieth century. See, for example, Alexandra Harmon, *Rich Indians: Native People and the Problem of Wealth in American History* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010); Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton, NJ, 2014).

Settler Colonialism

Many American historians dismiss “settler colonialism” as a trendy intellectual fad.⁹ But Canadian and Australian scholars have been refining the concept since the 1990s. They define settler colonialism as a distinct form of colonialism that involved sustained migration and permanent settlement by European-descended families, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and the development of elaborate institutions that allowed settlers and their descendants to gain numerical and political dominance.¹⁰ Patrick Wolfe, the late Australian historian who has been perhaps the most influential settler colonial theorist, posited that because settler colonialism aims to transfer Indigenous land into the hands of settlers, it therefore rests on the “logic of elimination” of Indigenous peoples.¹¹ In the United States, this logic led not only to attempts at physical elimination of Indigenous peoples but to a host of other technologies that helped to extinguish Indigenous cultures, identities, and claims to land and sovereignty, among them removal from homelands, confinement to reservations, allotment of communally held land to individuals, bureaucratic efforts to determine who was Indigenous, and aggressive assimilation efforts. Elimination contains an intellectual and cultural component as well—from the salvage ethnography of the nineteenth century that assumed the vanishing Indian, to “settler-humanitarianism,” to ongoing public debates about what constitutes an authentic Indian.¹² Settler colonialism manifests not only through government policy and practice, but also through non-state actors, including settlers taking their own actions.

Settler colonial theory helps to explain not only Indigenous histories but also aspects of slavery and immigration. The work of colonizing the land, growing cash crops on it, extracting resources from it, and then building the infrastructure that would help to transport harvests, minerals, and people often fell to a racialized labor force that settlers imported or recruited. Slaves and non-white immigrants, however, were only welcome within settler societies for their labor, not for their permanent settlement. Thus settler societies developed policies to undermine the formation of families and land ownership by those deemed non-white. We can see this dynamic at work in the American West, where support for the federal government’s Chinese Exclusion Act and other restrictions on Asian migration was strong, and where ten (of seventeen) territories and states west of the Missouri River enacted anti-miscegenation laws and “alien land laws” that deemed it illegal for non-citizens or “aliens

⁹See, for example, Nancy Shoemaker, “A Typology of Colonialism,” *Perspectives* (Oct. 2015): 29–30.

¹⁰Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, “Introduction: Beyond Dichotomies—Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class in Settler Societies,” in Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, *Unsettling Settler Societies*, 1–38, here 3.

¹¹In contrast, because the United States relied on slaves as laborers, Wolfe argues, the American racial system sought to increase their numbers through racial ideologies such as the one-drop rule and laws making children follow the condition of their mothers. See Wolfe, “Land, Labor, and Difference.” If you are new to settler colonialism, I recommend this article by Wolfe for its rigor. For other excellent discussions of the distinct nature of settler colonialism, see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke, UK, 2010) and Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

¹²For some recent compelling examples of unexpected types of elimination, see Katherine Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell: Native Americans and Assimilation Policy* (Lincoln, NE, 2017), which looks at how government administrators used bureaucratic maneuvers to eliminate Indigenous peoples; and Krista Maxwell, “Settler-Humanitarianism: Healing the Indigenous Child-Victim,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, no. 4 (Oct. 2017): 974–1007, which examines “liberal interventions” that “led ... not to annihilation, but rather to new modes of governance that pursued the elimination of Indigenous peoples as distinct social and political entities” (976). Some scholars are concerned that settler colonialism treats all forms of elimination as equal. Indeed its focus on “elimination” has brought it in close contact with genocide studies, an equally contentious field of thought. For two books that wrestle with these questions, see Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton, eds., *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America* (Durham, NC, 2014) and A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History* (New York, 2005).

ineligible for citizenship”—that is, non-whites—to buy or lease land.¹³ Because African Americans, Asian immigrants, and undocumented Mexican immigrants continued to resist their exclusion, Anglo-American settlers also “invested in imprisonment,” Kelly Lytle-Hernández writes, incarcerating “a diverse cast of Native landholders and racialized outsiders variously criminalized, policed, and caged as vagrants, drunks, hobos, rebels, illegal immigrants, and illegitimate residents trespassing in their white settler society.”¹⁴ Thus, settler colonial theory not only analyzes white settlers and Indigenous peoples in regard to land and property, but it also examines immigration and slavery in regard to labor, class, and race.

Certainly settler colonialism as an analytical framework has its drawbacks. Like any grand theory it can deterministically flatten out the textures of on-the-ground encounters and lived experiences. Some scholars worry that it runs the risk of “decentering Indigenous peoples['] own articulations of Indigenous-settler relations,” or that it “presents settler colonialism as transhistorical and inevitable, rather than conditioned and contingent.”¹⁵ Yet, we need not check our critical thinking credentials at the door as we enter the settler colonial party. We can approach the theory not as wide-eyed groupies but as the skeptical observers we have been trained to be. We can read deeply about settler colonialism and then test it against the historical evidence. As I have embarked on this task, I have found settler colonial theory to have compelling explanatory power for understanding American development overall and the American West in particular.

Marginalization and Its Implications

As historians, we are fond of cataloguing the ways in which our own subfields are not getting enough attention. But our efforts to argue for greater inclusion of the areas we find most intriguing and significant often seem a bit petulant (at least mine do, in retrospect). So from the outset let me say that I am as guilty of marginalizing Indigenous histories as other American historians. And I have no excuse since this is the focus of my own research! In the introductory U.S. women’s and gender history class that I regularly teach, I include much on Indigenous women in the first half of the course, but by the time we reach the twentieth century, I rarely mention the topic, except perhaps as part of a lecture on 1960s and 1970s social movements. I have the “best of intentions” (that refuge of so many white settler women), but I find it difficult to incorporate my own findings into the bigger, standard narratives we tell about the twentieth century. My efforts to include Indigenous women and gender come across to students as sidebars to the major issues—topics that invariably elicit the question, “Is this going to be on the exam?”

I am not alone. The textbook I use for this class, *Through Women’s Eyes*, covers Indigenous women in six of its seven pre-1900 chapters; it offers significant content on the subject in three

¹³Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ, 2004); Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York, 2009); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley, CA, 2011). The curious case of the federal government’s “plenary power” over both Indigenous peoples and immigrants points to a productive area of inquiry. See Susan Bibler Coutin, Justin Richland, and Véronique Fortin, “Routine Exceptionality: The Plenary Power Doctrine, Immigrants, and the Indigenous Under U.S. Law,” *UC Irvine Law Review* 4, no. 97 (2014): 97–120. As legal scholars Coutin et al. write, “Both immigrant and indigenous groups occupy a space of exception vis-à-vis U.S. law: as ‘resident aliens’ and ‘dependent nations’ they are inside and outside at the same time” (99). Coutin et al. argue that “federal law regarding Indians and immigrants relies on the power that accrues to nation-states by positioning persons, places, and practices as exceptions, outside the norm, where rule can be suspended in favor of political will” (105).

¹⁴Kelly Lytle-Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017), 12, 14.

¹⁵Corey Snelgrove, Rita Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel, “Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 1–32, here 26.

of these chapters. But in the last five chapters, from 1900 to the present, the book offers just a paragraph on Indigenous women during the Progressive Era, a paragraph on their expanded employment options during World War II, and two paragraphs on Indigenous women's activism during the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁶

Other synthetic texts similarly neglect twentieth-century Indigenous history. *American History Now: Critical Perspectives on the Past*, a 2011 anthology edited by Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr for the American Historical Association, claims that it is “quite different from the old ‘master narrative’ in offering a richer and more complex view of the American past.”¹⁷ In Part One, devoted to chronological coverage of the full sweep of American history, all but one of the pre-1877 essays include substantive material on Indigenous histories—a significant change from the past, when historians had often told the nation's history “without the Indians.”¹⁸ But the *only* reference to Indigenous peoples for the period after 1877, despite authors' heroic efforts to include a diverse array of historical actors in their essays, is one paragraph in Robert Johnston's chapter on the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Part Two, containing thematic essays, does include an essay by Ned Blackhawk, “American Indians and the Study of U.S. History,” signaling that the subject merits attention but nevertheless making it difficult to see its relevance to American history writ large. These two books are a small sample, but based on my experience with textbooks and other synthetic texts, I think they are representative.

If professional historians are not covering this material in college-level courses and textbooks, imagine what is lacking in K–12 education. As Sarah B. Shear finds, 87% of existing U.S. history standards related to Indigenous peoples for K–12 social studies curricula fall into the pre-1900 period. As she puts it, students “year after year, reify a master narrative of U.S. history that significantly confines the experiences of Indigenous peoples to the narratives of first contact and colonial conflict while silencing the complexities of those early relationships and the everyday struggle for sovereignty in the twenty-first century.”¹⁹

This almost total absence of Indigenous peoples from twentieth-century accounts eerily mirrors federal Indian policy. From at least 1871, U.S. policy demanded both the confinement of Indigenous peoples on reservations and their assimilation into mainstream society, including the separation of Indigenous children from their families in boarding schools.²⁰

¹⁶Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents*, 4th ed. (Boston, 2016), 422, 499, 626.

¹⁷Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., *American History Now: Critical Perspectives on the Past* (Philadelphia, 2011), viii.

¹⁸See James Axtell's withering article, “Colonial America Without the Indians: Counterfactual Reflections,” *Journal of American History* 73, no. 4 (Mar. 1987): 981–96. *American History Now's* chapter on slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction unfortunately ignores Indigenous peoples, though there is much new scholarship on Indigenous slavery. For examples, see Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (New York, 2016); Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York, 2006); Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA, 2015); and several works cited in footnote 23.

¹⁹Sarah B. Shear, “Cultural Genocide Masked as Education: U.S. History Textbooks' Coverage of Indigenous Education Policies,” in *Doing Race in Social Studies: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Prentice T. Chandler (Charlotte, NC, 2015), 13–40, here 22, 23. See also Sarah B. Shear, Ryan T. Knowles, Gregory J. Soden, and Antonio J. Castro, “Manifesting Destiny: Re/Presentations of Indigenous Peoples in K–12 U.S. History Standards,” *Theory & Research in Social Education* 43, no. 1 (2015): 68–101; Clifford E. Trafzer and Michelle Lorimer, “Silencing California Indian Genocide in Social Studies Texts,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 58, no. 1 (2014): 64–82.

²⁰The effort to confine Indigenous children to such institutions was a particularly egregious overreach of federal power that has no precedent in the modern United States, except perhaps the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, and that was a temporary program. See for example David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence, KS, 1995); Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940* (Lincoln, NE, 1998); K. Tsianina

American historians, too, have unintentionally sequestered Indigenous histories into a segregated intellectual space from where we only occasionally assimilate it into larger narratives. Perhaps we make mention of Indian boarding schools or feature some Indigenous intellectuals during the Progressive Era, maybe we refer to the Indian New Deal as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's new liberal state, or list the Red Power movement as one of many social movements of the late twentieth century. This selective and minimal incorporation of twentieth-century Indigenous histories not only perpetuates the long-held notion of Indians as amodern and thus outside modern history, but it also inadvertently fulfills the settler colonial logic of elimination that has driven American engagement with Indigenous peoples since the founding of the nation.²¹ Indeed, instead of making conscious efforts to *remember* our nation's settler colonial past—and its ongoing impact—we American historians seem to be engaged in collective forgetting. We are not really telling the nation's history if we forget Indigenous histories. We are also failing to place our national history into a wider global context by linking Indigenous histories in the United States with those of other settler colonial nations worldwide.

How can we explain this neglect? Partly it may be due to the greater focus on the pre-1900 period among historians of Indigenous peoples themselves. We have come a long way since James Axtell delivered his devastating counterfactual critique of the absence of Indigenous histories in our accounts of colonial America.²² Some of the richest and most influential recent historical writing has emerged from middle ground and borderlands histories that have demonstrated Indigenous power and dynamism in many parts of North America up to the mid-1800s.²³ But there is also a great deal of scholarship on modern Indigenous histories that could be synthesized into a broader twentieth-century narrative.²⁴ Why hasn't this happened?

Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* (New York, 2006); Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln, NE, 2009); Andrew Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment: Indigenous Boarding Schools, Genocide, and Redress in Canada and the United States* (Lincoln, NE, 2015).

²¹On the notion that Indians exist outside modernity, see Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS, 2004); O'Neill, "Rethinking Modernity."

²²Axtell, "Colonial America Without the Indians."

²³See, for example, Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, UK, 1991); James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); multiple works by Alan Taylor, including *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York, 2002); Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717* (New Haven, CT, 2003); Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007); Kathleen Duval, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia, 2007); Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Native Northeast* (Minneapolis, MN, 2008); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, CT, 2008); Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis, MN, 2010); Anne F. Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the American West, 1800–1860* (Lincoln, NE, 2011); Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012); and multiple works by Colin G. Calloway, including *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD, 2013).

²⁴See, for example, Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York, 1996); Hosmer and O'Neill, eds., *Native Pathways*; Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*; Charles Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* (New York, 2005); Colleen O'Neill, *Working the Navajo Way: Labor and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence, KS, 2005); Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence, KS, 2008); Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (Seattle, WA, 2009); Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009); Paul C. Rosier, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); William J. Bauer, *We Were All Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850–1941* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009); multiple works by

The problem, I believe, rests with the particular nature of the sweeping twentieth-century epic historians have created.²⁵ We often cast twentieth-century U. S. history as a showdown between liberal and conservative forces over the development of a welfare state and the increasing power of the federal government through two world wars, the New Deal, and the Great Society.²⁶ The history of race, which historians have framed primarily around African American experience, has played a prominent role in explaining this showdown. One common and still powerful narrative portrays the early 1960s as an era when liberal white legislators, under pressure from but in concert with African American civil rights leaders, ended legal segregation and advanced African American voting rights. That moment ended, the story goes, as a separatist Black Power movement, urban race riots, and intractable poverty exposed the limits of the liberal agenda and as a conservative backlash regained the political upper hand.²⁷ Twentieth-century Indigenous histories do not fit neatly into this epic narrative, although, as I discuss below, they have much to contribute to the subjects around which it revolves.

Reconsidering Race, Liberalism, and the Twentieth-Century Settler State

The state looms large in Indigenous histories, too, but in a different way and from a much earlier time. The founders stipulated that the federal government, rather than state legislatures, possessed authority over Indian affairs.²⁸ From Indigenous vantage points, the federal government was ballooning and extending its power throughout the nineteenth century. The Office of Indian Affairs (OIA; later renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs, or BIA) already served as a kind of welfare state to Indigenous peoples beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, as it dispensed rations (as a key provision of treaty agreements), erected day schools, and sent matrons and farmers, and later public health nurses and social workers, to reservations.²⁹ Race also figures prominently in Indigenous histories, but in ways quite different than in African American history. Settler colonial racial ideologies regarding “miscegenation” rested on a belief that racial mixing would result in the gradual disappearance of Indigenous peoples.

Donald L. Fixico, including *Indian Resilience and Rebuilding: Indigenous Nations in the Modern American West* (Tucson, AZ, 2013); Julie L. Davis, *Survival Schools: The American Indian Movement and Community Education in the Twin Cities* (Minneapolis, MN, 2013); Needham, *Power Lines*; multiple works by Brenda J. Child, including *My Grandfather's Knocking Sticks: Ojibwe Family Life and Labor on the Reservation* (St. Paul, MN, 2014); Louis S. Warren, *God's Red Son: The Ghost Dance Religion and the Making of Modern America* (New York, 2017); and articles by Boyd Cothran, C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, Chantal Norrgard, Cathleen D. Cahill, Malinda Maynor Lowery, John W. Troutman, and Philip J. Deloria in “Forum: Indigenous Histories of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14, no. 4 (Oct. 2015): 503–579.

²⁵In *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston, 2014), Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz writes, “The main challenge for scholars in revising US history in the context of colonialism is not lack of information, nor is it one of methodology.... Rather, the source of the problems has been the refusal or inability of US historians to comprehend the nature of their own history, US history. The fundamental problem is the absence of the colonial framework” (7).

²⁶Meg Jacobs (no relation) writes in *American History Now*, for example, that “As much as the New Deal order defined the postwar period, so, too, did the tensions between liberalism and conservatism that existed within it”: Meg Jacobs, “The Uncertain Future of American Politics, 1940 to 1973,” in *American History Now*, eds. Foner and McGirr, 151–74, here 168.

²⁷See, for example, Carol A. Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism* (New York, 2005).

²⁸The Commerce Clause of the Constitution (Article 1, section 8, clause 3) mandates that Congress shall have power “to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian tribes” (Bruyneel, *Third Space of Sovereignty*, 11). The 1787 Northwest Ordinance and the Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790 both affirmed that dealing with Indians was the province of the federal government. See David E. Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law* (Norman, OK, 2001), 102–3.

²⁹Cathleen D. Cahill makes this point about the OIA as an early welfare agency in *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869–1933* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011), 17–8, 25–6, 30–2.

By contrast the “one-drop” rule for African Americans meant that there would always be a supply of racialized cheap labor.³⁰ And what constituted a means to overcome racial discrimination and inequality for African Americans—education—became a tool of empire that the government used against Indigenous peoples.³¹

How might it change our overall narratives if we try to “see like a (settler colonial) state” that was compelled by the racial logic of elimination?³² What if we saw liberalism and conservatism not as two diametrically opposed forces but as two rival visions for settler state making: one bent on achieving Indigenous elimination through the invisible hand of the market, the other through the outstretched benevolent hand of the welfare state? The settler state, in either version, continues to view Indigenous peoples as a “problem,” because they often live within the poorest communities in the nation and represent an anomaly within the federalist system—a “third space” of sovereignty, in the words of Kevin Bruyneel.³³ Conservatives continually argue for privatizing Indigenous assets, a step supported by terminationists in the 1950s and libertarians today.³⁴ Liberals favor a more gentle, but no less eliminationist, approach, through the extension of equal rights. If we add a third Indigenous dimension to the conventional face-off between conservatives and liberals, we end up with a more multifaceted understanding of the state in twentieth-century U.S. history. This approach—seeing like a settler colonial state—complements and extends some of the recent critiques within American political history.

Until recently, our dominant narrative about the state in twentieth-century U.S. history focused on the ascendancy of the liberal New Deal order and its demise with the rise of modern conservatism. A number of historians have been critiquing this concept, some arguing that liberalism was “the great exception” between two Gilded Ages; others, as Kim Phillips-Fein points out, contend that there is much more underlying structural continuity between liberalism and conservatism as seen through “the rise of the surveillance state . . . , the bipartisan support for the drug laws that have helped to create mass incarceration, the expansion of the military state, the role of anticommunism in defining American politics throughout the second half of the twentieth century and the commitment to the primacy of the power of the United States in the world.”³⁵ African American history, particularly in regard to the latest studies of mass incarceration, clearly informs this new direction in political history, enabling us to gain insight about the state by shifting our focus and perspective. But what if historians expanded out from African American history to consider race and liberalism more broadly?³⁶

³⁰Wolfe, “Land, Labor, and Difference,” 882–7.

³¹Margaret D. Jacobs, “Plotting Colonization and Recentring Indigenous Actors: Approaches to and Sources for Studying the History of Indigenous Education,” in *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, ed. Chris Andersen and Jean M. O’Brien (New York, 2017), 266–73.

³²Here I am riffing off James C. Scott’s book, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT, 1999).

³³Bruyneel, *Third Space of Sovereignty*, especially 13, 226.

³⁴For the libertarian view today, see Naomi Schaefer Riley, *The New Trail of Tears: How Washington Is Destroying American Indians* (New York, 2016). Despite the title, which implies empathy toward American Indians, the book primarily espouses the privatization of Indian communal assets. For a critique of the book, see Matthew Fletcher’s blog, *Turtle Talk*, <https://turtletalk.wordpress.com/tag/the-new-trail-of-tears/> (accessed June 23, 2017).

³⁵Kim Phillips-Fein, “Our Political Narratives,” *Modern American History* 1, no.1 (Spring 2018): 83–6, here 85. See also Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, “The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 74 (Fall 2008), 3–32; Matthew D. Lassiter, “Political History Beyond the Red-Blue Divide,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (Dec. 2011), 760–4; Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).

³⁶There is a vast literature on liberalism and race. See, for example, Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism*; Devin Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics, 1965–1980* (Athens, GA, 2009). Nearly all this literature conflates questions of race with African Americans. For example, see David Carroll Cochran, *The Color of Freedom: Race and Contemporary American Liberalism* (Albany, NY, 1999). Cochran writes

Training our eyes on post–World War II Indigenous histories builds on this new history of the American state. The twentieth-century settler colonial state is one in which we also see more continuity between liberalism and conservatism than stark differences or dramatic changes in policy.

In the post–World War II era, white liberals had been thinking about race in relation to Indigenous peoples as much as African Americans. Many of them had been deeply concerned with the so-called “Indian problem” since the late 1940s.³⁷ Although most of the nation had flourished economically after World War II, Indigenous peoples had not shared in the bounty. For many Americans, this represented a source of national shame and an urgent social issue that became part of the liberal agenda. Many liberal Christian church leaders, for example, emphasized a sense of obligation to Indigenous peoples that was both a Christian calling and an American responsibility. Harold Fey, a former minister and editor for the *Christian Century*, a nondenominational Protestant weekly, asserted forcefully in one of his editorials, “No question of human relations involves our spiritual integrity more deeply than this one. At no point does the relation between the ‘white’ and ‘colored’ races more clearly pose the issue of social justice.”³⁸ Fey’s telling declaration seems a not-so-veiled challenge to Gunnar Myrdal’s influential *American Dilemma*, which called white relations with African Americans “the most glaring conflict in the American conscience.”³⁹

In the 1940s and 1950s a virtual consensus emerged across the political spectrum among non-Indigenous people about the misery and deprivation suffered by Indigenous peoples—their “plight” as it was commonly put.⁴⁰ Social scientists, who gained widespread influence in the post–World War II era, popularized a cluster of assumptions about the persistent “Indian problem.” Gordon MacGregor’s *Warriors Without Weapons* (1946), a study of the Lakota on Pine Ridge Reservation, concluded that the “modern Indian way of life is one of emptiness.”⁴¹ MacGregor attributed this emptiness in part to supposed changes in gender roles and the resulting aberrant families. The Sioux had traditionally been a male-centered culture, he asserted, but men’s roles had been reduced while the position of women in family and community had risen. As a result, he claimed that women had become critical of men’s behavior, hostility had erupted between the sexes, and Indigenous families had become dysfunctional.⁴² (Ella Deloria, a Standing Rock Sioux intellectual, fought against such demeaning portrayals but struggled to gain a publisher for her work.⁴³) MacGregor’s portrait of the

that the United States’ “deepest and most persistent public problem has always centered on its history of either obliterating or subverting the freedom of black Americans and on their efforts to overcome this history” (1).

³⁷Some of the material in this section has been published in Margaret D. Jacobs, “Remembering the ‘Forgotten Child’: The American Indian Child Welfare Crisis of the 1960s and 1970s,” *American Indian Quarterly* 37, nos. 1–2 (Winter/Spring 2013): 136–59; Margaret D. Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (Lincoln, NE, 2014).

³⁸Harold Fey, “Indian Winter,” *Christian Century*, Mar. 2, 1955, 265–7, here 265. For more on the intersections between religion and liberalism, see Anthony E. Cook, *The Least of These: Race, Law, and Religion in American Culture* (New York, 1997).

³⁹Quoted in Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism*, 125.

⁴⁰Articles on the “plight of the Navajos,” for example, filled American newspapers and magazines in the late 1940s. See Rosier, *Serving Their Country*, 123–30; and Mary Ann Weston, *Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth Century Press* (Westport, CT, 1996), 105. See Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York, 1969). Deloria wrote in 1969, “Other groups have difficulties, predicaments, quandaries, problems, or troubles. Traditionally we Indians have had a ‘plight’” (1).

⁴¹Gordon MacGregor, *Warriors Without Weapons: A Study of the Society and Personality Development of the Pine Ridge Sioux* (Chicago, 1946), 121.

⁴²MacGregor, *Warriors Without Weapons*, 57, 118–9.

⁴³See Ella Cara Deloria, *Waterlily* (Lincoln, NE, 1988). Only eighteen years after Deloria’s death did the University of Nebraska Press publish her 1948 historical novel, *Waterlily*, which emphasized the longstanding importance of women within Lakota/Nakota/Dakota cultures as well as the high value placed on kinship and extended families.

pathological Indigenous family predates Daniel Patrick Moynihan's similar assessment of "the Negro family" by almost twenty years.⁴⁴

Liberal representations of Indigenous peoples had important policy implications. Nearly all liberal social observers reduced Indigeneity to a grim set of socioeconomic indicators. Though sympathetic, these portrayals helped to create a ubiquitous set of images that would contribute more to an abrogation of Indigenous rights than an alleviation of their hardships. Most liberal Americans maintained that Indigenous people suffered differential treatment because of their race. Thus they often championed a color-blind society that would extend all the same rights, responsibilities, and benefits to Indigenous people that other Americans supposedly enjoyed, based on the "belief that the eradication of racism depends on the deliberate non-recognition of race."⁴⁵ On the surface, this may sound like a noble goal, but in its impulse to uphold individual rights, color-blind liberalism often had the effect of undermining Indigenous tribal rights. Indeed, after World War II, Congress enacted a new policy toward Indigenous people: urban relocation and termination, which aimed to extinguish the unique trust responsibility of the federal government toward Indigenous nations.

Liberalism and Indigenous Child Removal

Despite the rhetoric of egalitarianism and humanitarianism, the liberal agenda in the postwar era involved intense state surveillance and intervention into the lives of Indigenous peoples. This can be seen particularly through Indian child welfare policies and practices. In 1958, as part of termination policy, the BIA partnered with the Child Welfare League of America, a well-regarded umbrella organization made up of private adoption agencies, church groups, and state welfare departments. They created the Indian Adoption Program (IAP), which placed hundreds of Indigenous children in non-Indigenous adoptive homes—a program that appealed greatly to diehard assimilationists, federal cost cutters, and cash-strapped state agencies. State social service agencies as well as private groups, such as Lutheran Social Services and Catholic Social Services, also began placing thousands of Indigenous children in foster or adoptive homes. Adoption presented the ultimate solution to the perennial "Indian problem," from the point of view of settler state bureaucrats. Children would have no contact with their tribal communities (or with peer groups as they had in boarding schools earlier). They would grow up in middle-class homes, and thus, administrators thought, they would become truly absorbed into mainstream American culture. In settler colonial terms, they would be eliminated—through cultural assimilation—at long last. And because adoptive families would bear the cost of raising the children, neither the federal government nor the states would have to fund their care. The promotion of Indigenous adoption dramatically increased both federal and state intrusion into Indigenous families and communities. By the early 1970s, Indigenous children were vastly over-represented in state child welfare systems. Across the nation an average of 25–35 percent of Indigenous children had been removed from their tribal communities and families.⁴⁶

Indigenous child removal and adoption drew strength from a climate of liberal concern. The IAP's director, Arnold Lyslo, cultivated demand for Indigenous adoptees by exploiting liberal Americans' desires to reach across racial boundaries and alleviate Indigenous hardship. Lyslo built upon plight narratives and sought to stimulate interest in adoption by positioning

⁴⁴Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," Mar. 1965, <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm> (accessed June 21, 2017).

⁴⁵Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 313. See also Cochran, *Color of Freedom*, 2, 3, 8, 17–21, 32, 62; Cook, *Least of These*, 226–230.

⁴⁶U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Indian Affairs, "Appendix G: Indian Child Welfare Statistical Survey, July 1976, Association of American Indian Affairs," *Indian Child Welfare Act of 1977*, 95th Cong. 1st sess., Aug. 4, 1977 (Washington, DC, 1977), 538.

Indigenous children as “forgotten.”⁴⁷ “During the past decade,” he wrote, “there have been many programs designed to promote the adoption of all children—the handicapped child, the child in the older age group, children of other racial groups both within the United States and from foreign lands. But the Indigenous child has remained the ‘forgotten child,’ left unloved and uncared for on the reservation, without a home or parents he can call his own.”⁴⁸ Officials thus claimed that adoption would alleviate Indian plight.

Moreover, in accordance with liberalism’s veneration of individual rights, Lyslo and other adoption proponents characterized the individual Indigenous child as the victim of racism. Indigenous children, they claimed, suffered from racial inequality because they had “been deprived of adoption opportunities” available to other children. Likewise, unwed Indigenous mothers, they asserted, had been denied the choice to put their babies up for adoption.⁴⁹ Adoption supporters increasingly conveyed these liberal sentiments with single images and a minimum of text. In one article he wrote for *Catholic Charities*, for example, Lyslo included a photograph of an Indigenous toddler, happily frolicking on a stretch of sand. Its caption, “Dead end—or a chance?” encapsulated both the supposedly inherent pathology of Indigenous life and the liberal benevolence of adoption.⁵⁰ Such narratives became virtually commonsense among most non-Indigenous Americans in the late 1950s and 1960s. Drawn to the adoption solution to Indigenous poverty over other alternatives that many Indigenous people championed—fighting termination, protecting Indigenous resources, spurring economic development, and promoting self-determination—liberal white Americans embraced the rescue of individual Indigenous children.⁵¹ Rather than following the social work protocols of the era, which called for making every effort to prevent family breakdown, state agencies, in collusion with the federal government, supported a system in which up to one-third of all Indigenous children were living apart from their families.⁵² This led, ironically, to differential racial treatment of Indigenous people extraordinaire.

Histories of liberalism and race in the postwar era take on a different meaning when we add Indigenous histories and settler colonialism to the mix. The supposed rise of liberalism coincided with the heyday of the Indian Adoption Project, when government administrators, in the name of assimilation and ending Indigenous poverty, removed children from their families en masse, often without cause. The promotion of adoption, like the boarding schools, represented another unprecedented effort by the state to eliminate Indigenous peoples through intervention in the intimate realm of family life. Without their children, tribes could not reproduce their cultures, pass on their religious beliefs and ceremonies, maintain their languages, sustain their kinship relations, train new leaders, or preserve their sovereignties. One woman,

⁴⁷Lyndon B. Johnson later used the same term to describe Indigenous people in general in a well-known speech to Congress in 1968. See Lyndon B. Johnson, “Special Message to Congress on the Problems of the American Indian: ‘The Forgotten American,’” *American Presidency Project*, Mar. 6, 1968, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=28709#axzz1tG4ZchrR> (accessed Apr. 27, 2012).

⁴⁸“Indian Adoption Project,” Apr. 1960, 3, folder 3, box 17, Child Welfare League of American (CWLA) papers, Social Welfare History Archives, Special Collections, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, MN [hereafter CWLA papers].

⁴⁹Joseph Reid, CWLA, to Philo Nash, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 7, 1963, and quarterly report on IAP, folder 4, box 17, CWLA papers.

⁵⁰Arnold Lyslo, “The Indian Adoption Project: An Appeal to Catholic Agencies to Participate,” *Catholic Charities Review* 48, no. 5 (May 1964): 12–6, here 13.

⁵¹See Harold Fey, “Our National Indian Policy,” *Christian Century*, Mar. 30, 1955, 395–7. Some liberals, including Fey, who worked closely with the Flathead activist D’arcy McNickle, advocated more adequate economic development and better safeguarding of natural resources on Indian reservations, but his was increasingly a minority viewpoint even among liberal Christians who became more likely to support aggressive assimilation campaigns.

⁵²For social work protocols of the time, see “Child Welfare League of America Standards for Child Protective Service” (New York: CWLA, 1960), 12, folder 5, box 14, CWLA papers.

Jeanette Goodhouse, of the Devils Lake (now Spirit Lake) Sioux of the Fort Totten reservation, called it the “slow termination” of the tribe.⁵³

The widespread separation of Indigenous children from their families—and the eliminatory impulses underlying it—is still ongoing and has had other damaging repercussions that have much in common with many African American experiences. African American children have been over-represented in foster care, too, since at least the 1970s.⁵⁴ But the similarities do not stop there. Indigenous people in the United States today are more likely to be killed by police than any other racialized group, and they face disproportionate rates of incarceration.⁵⁵ As one Canadian scholar puts it, “Prisons are filled with Indigenous mothers, while child welfare institutions are full of their children. The child welfare system and the prison system thus emerge as two intersecting institutional frameworks through which settler colonial power over Indigenous peoples is authorized and enacted.”⁵⁶ Our critical new histories of the carceral state will be further enlivened by an attention to Indigenous histories and settler colonialism.

Indigenous histories also help us to link domestic and foreign policies in the postwar era. As hinted at in Arnold Lyslo’s comment about increasing adoptions from “foreign lands,” the promotion of Indigenous adoption as a settler colonial move had much in common with the promotion of International adoption in the post–World War II period, especially from war-torn Korea. Popular representations of Korean “orphans” also depicted their lives as bleak and their futures grim unless American families rescued them. Supporters of Korean adoption also claimed to be operating under color-blind ideals. Arissa Oh and others have shown how international adoption was linked inextricably with U.S. military occupation on the peninsula despite the rhetoric of simple humanitarianism.⁵⁷ The burgeoning and robust scholarship on adoption offers a crucial means of reconstructing twentieth-century historical narratives that connect U.S. foreign relations and domestic scholarship as well as to demonstrate how the state has viewed family formation as critical to both its settler colonial and foreign policy agendas.⁵⁸

⁵³Quoted in David Jordan, “Indians Battle to Keep Foster Children on Reservation,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 28, 1968, clipping, folder 2, box 390, Association on American Indian Affairs Records, 1851–2010, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ.

⁵⁴Dorothy Roberts, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* (New York, 2002). African American disproportionality in foster care decreased from 2.5 to 1.7 nationally between 2000 and 2014, while “American Indian disproportionality has increased over the last fourteen years from 1.5 to 2.7,” and Indigenous children are the most over-represented ethnic group in out-of-home care. See Alicia Summers, *Disproportionality Rates for Children of Color in Foster Care (FY 2014)*, Technical Assistance Bulletin (Reno, NV, 2016), 3, <http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/NCJFCJ%202014%20Disproportionality%20TAB%20Final.pdf> (accessed July 25, 2017).

⁵⁵Indigenous children face higher rates of confinement in the juvenile justice system than any other group in American society. Indigenous girls are particularly over-represented in juvenile detention facilities at a rate nearly five times that of white girls. Indigenous adult men are incarcerated at a rate four times that of white men and Indigenous women six times that of white women: statistics from the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in Derrick Broze, “Native Girls have Highest Rates of Incarceration,” *Activist Post*, Mar. 22, 2016, <http://www.activistpost.com/2016/03/native-american-girls-highest-rate-incarceration.html> (accessed June 16, 2017). See also Jake Flanagan, “Native Americans Are the Unseen Victims of a Broken US Justice System,” *Quartz*, Apr. 22, 2015, <https://qz.com/392342/native-americans-are-the-unseen-victims-of-a-broken-us-justice-system/> (accessed June 16, 2017).

⁵⁶Laura C. L. Landertinger, “Settler Colonialism and Carceral Control of Indigenous Mothers and Their Children: Child Welfare and the Prison System,” in *Criminalized Mothers, Criminalizing Motherhood*, ed. Joanne Minaker and Bryan Hogeveen (Bradford, ON, Canada, 2015), 59–87, here 73–4.

⁵⁷Arissa H. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption* (Stanford, CA, 2015), especially 2, 5, 104–11; Laura Briggs, *Somebody’s Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (Durham, NC, 2012).

⁵⁸Other recent scholarship suggests how attention to Indigenous histories may alter the stories we tell about twentieth-century American diplomacy and military history. See, for example, Rosier, *Serving Their Country*, and Paul C. Rosier, “Crossing New Boundaries: American Indians and Twentieth Century U.S. Foreign Policy,”

Indigenous Histories and Social Movements

Our accounts of late twentieth-century social movements also will be enriched by attention to Indigenous histories. Indigenous people fought to make the contradictions of the postwar liberal framework apparent. For example, in 1965, Shirley Hill Witt (Mohawk) wrote: “At a time when new nations all over the globe are emerging from colonial control, their right to choose their own course places a vast burden of responsibility upon the most powerful nations to honor and protect those rights.... The Indians of the United States may well present the test case of American liberalism.”⁵⁹ Witt’s comment makes clear that Indigenous peoples in the United States had a distinctive agenda and strategy for the advancement of their goals that often was at odds with color-blind liberalism and integrationism. Her statement also shows that Indigenous activists often identified with decolonization movements worldwide.

The phenomenon by which one-third of all Indigenous children had been separated from families led to a social movement among Indigenous peoples that exposed the limitations of a liberal color-blind approach and challenges how historians tell the story of 1960s social movements. Until 1968, Indigenous parents had little recourse when they experienced intense pressure to give their newborns up for adoption or lost their children to zealous state welfare workers. In 1968, one Mandan foster mother in North Dakota, Mrs. Fournier, challenged local welfare authorities when they tried to remove Ivan Brown, the Indigenous child she had taken care of for two years, and put him up for adoption. Her defiance launched a movement. From 1968 to 1978, Indigenous women activists, in concert with advocacy groups such as the Association on American Indian Affairs, mounted a campaign to reunite families and assert their tribes’ sovereignty over children. Their movement, which culminated in the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, was part of a larger struggle for self-determination and sovereignty that included fish-ins in the Northwest, the occupation of Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay, and the Trail of Broken Treaties march on Washington.⁶⁰

Too often twentieth-century American historians have treated Indigenous peoples, if they have included them at all, as just one among a number of racial and ethnic minorities clamoring for civil rights in the 1960s and 1970s. But Indigenous social movements of that era do not fit the available narrative templates. Indigenous activists did not move from an integrationist to a separatist approach. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s was not their primary influence or model. Rather groups such as the National Congress of American Indians had been working since 1944 to oppose termination and assert tribal collective rights, sovereignty, and self-determination—a focus that challenges the liberal civil rights agenda, its veneration of the individual as the bearer of rights, and its colorblind view of race. As Witt’s comment above suggests, too, they often identified more with a global decolonization movement than with the African American civil rights movement at home.⁶¹ Put another way,

Diplomatic History 39, no. 5 (Nov. 2015): 955–66; Alexandra Harmon, “American Indians, American Law, and Modern American Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 5 (Nov. 2015): 943–54.

⁵⁹Shirley Hill Witt, “Nationalistic Trends among American Indians,” *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1965): 51–74, here 51.

⁶⁰Jacobs, *A Generation Removed*, 69–161. For more on self-determination movements, see Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle*; Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*; Cobb, *Native Activism*.

⁶¹Many scholars have made similar points. See Jodi A. Byrd, “Introduction” to “Forum: Indigeneity’s Difference: Methodology and the Structures of Sovereignty,” *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 131–6; J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, “Colonialism in Equality: Hawaiian Sovereignty and the Question of U.S. Civil Rights,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 635–50, here 636; Frederick E. Hoxie, “Sovereignty’s Challenge to Native American (and United States) History,” *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 137–42; Harmon, “American Indians, American Law, and Modern American Foreign Relations,” 945–8; Deloria, “American Master Narratives,” 6–7.

Indigenous movements “were not requesting rights arising from within the United States, but asserting external or supranational rights that constrained it.”⁶²

Ultimately, twentieth-century Indigenous histories challenge the liberal progressive narrative at the heart of American history, which holds that the nation’s founders created a limited government with a utopian view of individual rights that has taken centuries to fully realize and still remains an unfinished product. Historians have recognized and explored some of the paradoxes inherent in this narrative: one between American freedom and slavery, for example.⁶³ But there is another paradox at the heart of this liberal narrative: that between the stated liberal goals of limited government by the consent of the people and a settler colonial project based on conquest, colonization, and unparalleled state intervention into Indigenous families. An explicit, pointed, and in-depth analysis of settler colonialism as it continues to play out in the twentieth century would help us better understand and plumb this paradox. Such an endeavor would help us place the United States within world history, as strategies of elimination in the U.S. paralleled other settler colonial nations, and as Indigenous experiences and movements did as well.⁶⁴ Taking Indigenous histories seriously ultimately demands a new paradigm for studying twentieth-century U.S. history—one that looks at the dispossession of Indigenous peoples through many phases of settler colonialism, as well as their survival and ongoing quest for sovereignty.

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⁶²Taiawagi Helton and Lindsay G. Robertson, “The Foundations of Federal Indian Law and Its Application in the Twentieth Century,” in *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism Since 1900*, ed. Daniel M. Cobb and Loretta Fowler (Santa Fe, NM, 2007), 33–55, here 35. Wilkins and Lomawaima write in *Uneven Ground*, “American Indian people are not merely another ‘minority,’ defined as an ethnic group or an economic class, because tribes possess a nation-to-nation political relationship with the federal government. That unique political relationship is founded on the principle of tribal sovereignty, on the facts of treaty negotiation and ratification, and on the contractual and voluntary federal assumption of a trust responsibility and relationship to tribes” (250).

⁶³For one of the earliest books to do so, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975).

⁶⁴I explore this in depth in *A Generation Removed*, 165–272.